

# Liberal internationalism: historical trajectory and current prospects

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The end of the Cold War was widely seen as ushering in a liberal world order. Liberal states seemed to have triumphed over communism, liberal theories appeared vindicated while realism found itself in trouble, and liberal internationalist policies were expected to quickly realize liberal principles in all those parts of the world that had not yet fully embraced them.

It did not take long for these expectations to be frustrated. Even in the course of the 1990s, many of the policies designed to realize this vision—from democracy promotion through humanitarian intervention to neo-liberal economic policies—failed to achieve their aims. Under the Bush administration in the early 2000s, the United States seemed to abandon liberal internationalism altogether. It replaced multilateralism with unilateralism, shunned its friends and allies, ignored international institutions, pursued an aggressive and illegal foreign policy, and blatantly violated human rights.<sup>1</sup> In addition, neo-liberal economic policies led in 2008 to a global financial crisis. Liberal internationalism, as observers widely agreed, was in crisis; some even argued that the liberal international ‘experiment has failed’.<sup>2</sup>

Proponents of liberal internationalism argued, on the contrary, that reports of its death had been greatly exaggerated. Though they concurred that liberal internationalism was in crisis, their analysis suggested that this was a crisis of success—a success that had fed the hubris of the United States as the leading power and architect of the liberal world order since 1945. Insensitive to the positions and interests of other states, it acted like a bully and thus generated resistance. Thus, Ikenberry argues, it is not liberal internationalism that is in crisis but rather America’s authority as the hegemonic leader of the liberal world order; the crisis is one of ‘American authority’.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: the origins, crisis, and transformation of the American world order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), esp. ch. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Itamar Rabinovich, ‘The case of restraint’, *The American Interest*, 1 Nov. 2007; G. John Ikenberry, ‘Introduction: Woodrow Wilson, the Bush administration, and the future of liberal internationalism’, in G. John Ikenberry, Thomas J. Knock, Anne-Marie Slaughter and Tony Smith, *The crisis of American foreign policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 4. See also Rebekka Friedman, Kevork Oskanian and Ramon Pacheco Pardo, eds, *After liberalism? The future of liberalism in international relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Jeffrey M. Chwieroth and Andrew Walter, ‘Banking crises and politics: a long-run perspective’, *International Affairs* 93: 5, Sept. 2017, pp. 1107–30.

<sup>3</sup> G. John Ikenberry, ‘The future of liberal world order’, *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 16: 3, Sept. 2015, p. 451.

According to this analysis, the successful spread of liberal principles in the international sphere provided excellent conditions for a revival of liberal internationalism.<sup>4</sup> In the absence of serious external enemies, the United States was free to embark on internal reform, in order to address this crisis of ‘American authority’. A liberal international environment, in other words, was seen as a precondition for, and conducive to, the realization of liberal principles *per se*. And these principles in turn would provide the basis for a reformed ‘democratic internationalism’ without the counterproductive features of American hubris and exceptionalism.<sup>5</sup>

Recent political developments, however, run counter to these expectations. The Brexit vote,<sup>6</sup> the election of Donald Trump and the rise of populism in core liberal states more generally constitute an attack on, rather than the reform of, core liberal principles. What is more, instead of capitalizing on the successes of liberal internationalism, these movements explicitly set out to demolish its core principles and achievements. These developments suggest that liberalism’s international success, far from providing the basis for domestic reform, plays a role in undermining its domestic constituency.

Assessing the prospects of liberal internationalism thus requires an analysis of its role in and for liberalism in general. I will begin by showing that the relationship between the domestic and the international spheres plays a crucial—albeit radically different—role in liberal internationalism, as it does also in contemporary populism. In order to evaluate these two contradictory accounts, the second part of this article explores the relationship between the domestic and the international in liberal theory—and shows that their separation is a precondition for, and constitutive of, liberalism. The third section provides a brief historical sketch of the establishment and development of liberalism. It demonstrates that the divide between the domestic and international spheres allowed liberalism to manage its internal contradictions. Overcoming that divide through the successful constitution of a globalized liberal world order undermines this function and thus endangers the political, economic and ideological basis of liberalism as such.

This analysis suggests, I will conclude, that the successful spread of liberal principles abroad paradoxically undermines liberalism at home. While the advocates of liberal internationalism are correct, therefore, to identify the current crisis as one of success, they mistakenly reduce this crisis to one of American leadership and misjudge its implications. Rather, the prospects of liberalism—and by extension of liberal (or a reformed democratic) internationalism—are dependent on the emergence of serious external and/or internal threats, on the re-establishment of a clear domestic/international divide. And the latter, I argue, is paradoxically the goal of the Brexiteers, the Trumpists and contemporary populist movements more generally.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism: an American grand strategy for a post-exceptionalist era* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, Nov. 2012), p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*.

<sup>6</sup> Anand Menon and John-Paul Salter, ‘Brexit: initial reflections’, *International Affairs* 92: 6, 2016, pp. 1297–318.

## **The crisis of liberal internationalism**

Liberal internationalism is today widely associated with the foreign policies of the United States—particularly since the Second World War, but often also traced back to Woodrow Wilson. Liberal internationalism and American foreign policy are, of course, not identical. Some American governments, such as those headed by the Bush and Trump administrations, do not pursue liberal internationalist foreign policies; and the foreign policies of other (for example, European) states may also fit into this framework. There is nevertheless significant overlap between the current debate on the crisis of liberal internationalism and American foreign policy—largely because the United States has been the leading liberal power in world politics during the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup>

In order to sketch the crisis of liberal internationalism, it is necessary first to outline its achievements. Between 1945 and 1989 the United States managed to establish a liberal order in the western part of the world, a liberal international subsystem.<sup>8</sup> This liberal subsystem had five distinguishing features: co-binding security arrangements; penetrated reciprocal hegemony;<sup>9</sup> the integration of semi-sovereign and partial Great Powers; economic openness; and civic identity.<sup>10</sup> Against this background, the end of the Cold War opened up the possibility of extending these features to the international order at large; the chance to realize a liberal world order

marked by openness, sovereign equality, respect for human rights, democratic accountability, widely shared economic opportunity, and the muting of great power rivalry, as well as collective efforts to keep the peace, promote the rule of law, and sustain an array of international institutions tailored to solving and managing common global problems.<sup>11</sup>

This vision, however, did not come to pass, despite considerable efforts during the 1990s. While capitalism and neo-liberal economic policies were successfully rolled out to societies in eastern Europe and the developing world that had previously followed the Soviet model, they did not generate general prosperity but on the contrary led to economically very painful transitions and rising inequality. Concerted efforts to promote democracy—through assistance, sanctions and military interventions—led in most target societies to some form of ‘illiberal’ or

<sup>7</sup> My analysis focuses largely on the work of John Ikenberry and his collaborators as the most prolific and dedicated—or ‘acute’, in Samuel Moyn’s terms (‘Soft sells: on liberal internationalism’, *Foreign Policy*, 14 Sept. 2011)—of the American advocates of liberal internationalism today. See e.g. G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal order and imperial ambition* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), and *Liberal Leviathan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); G. John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter, eds, *Forging a world of liberty under law: US national security in the 21st century. Final report of the Princeton Project on National Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 22 Sept. 2016), <http://www.princeton.edu/~ppns/report/FinalReport.pdf>. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 9 Oct. 2017.) Because of the association of liberal internationalism with American foreign policies, I will focus on the latter and on developments in Europe in the historical section of this article.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, ‘The nature and sources of liberal international order’, *Review of International Studies* 25: 2, 1999, p. 196.

<sup>9</sup> State structures accessible to outside influences and transnational networks enhance the reciprocal and legitimate character of the liberal hegemony of the US (Deudney and Ikenberry, ‘Nature and sources’, pp. 184–7).

<sup>10</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, ‘Nature and sources’, pp. 180–1.

<sup>11</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*, pp. 7–8.

‘authoritarian democracy’.<sup>12</sup> Humanitarian interventions were selectively undertaken and quickly abandoned in the face of (human or financial) costs, often destabilizing polities and even triggering civil war.<sup>13</sup>

Many of these failures, liberal internationalists argued, had their roots in American exceptionalism and hubris. Being ‘born liberal’ with little experience of violent class struggle, the United States overlooked the fact that capitalism generates ‘maldistribution of wealth, income, and opportunity’ and thus requires social democratic forms of redistribution. Instead, it imposed the ‘fundamentalist capitalism’ of the Reagan–Thatcher era through policies that increased inequality, divided populations, undermined support for free trade, and highlighted the fact that the United States does not accept responsibility to help the ‘bottom billion’.<sup>14</sup>

The unique historical experience of the United States also blinded it to the fact that the introduction of democracy in states characterized by different social and political conditions—both in Europe and in post-colonial states—had led to the development of different models of democracy. Its leading role allowed Washington to overlook the fact that these models of democracy were, on many measures, more successful than the American one which it exported indiscriminately.<sup>15</sup>

The extraordinary power of the United States in a unipolar liberal world order also enabled it to ignore the interests and identities of other states, make frequent interventions in their internal affairs, practise power politics, and even wage aggressive war in Iraq. Despite its military might, the rise of terrorism indicated that US foreign policies were failing to provide security even for liberal publics.<sup>16</sup> Thus America’s high-handed policies—its willingness to reject treaties (the Kyoto Protocol, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty), its violation of international law (at Guantánamo Bay), its rejection of help from NATO in the war against the Taliban, its decision to wage war against Iraq without UN authorization—saw a decline in its authority and led to resistance even among friends and allies.<sup>17</sup>

According to this account, the crisis of liberal internationalism is a crisis of success. Liberal internationalist policies were so successful in empowering the United States that it was able to disregard the interests and achievements of other states, to ignore its own shortcomings, to apply international law and military power selectively, and to undermine commitment to free trade while paving the

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Carothers, ‘Taking stock of US democracy assistance’, in Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry and Takashi Inoguchi, eds, *American democracy promotion: impulses, strategies, and impacts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. Alan J. Kuperman, ‘A model humanitarian intervention? Reassessing NATO’s Libya campaign’, *International Security* 38: 1, 2013, pp. 105–36.

<sup>14</sup> <sup>12</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*, pp. 17, 8, 4; Charles A. Kupchan and Peter L. Trubowitz, ‘Dead center: the demise of liberal internationalism in the United States’, *International Security* 32: 2, Fall 2007, pp. 35–6; Tim Dunne and Matt McDonald, ‘The politics of liberal internationalism’, *International Politics* 50: 1, 2013, pp. 11, 13.

<sup>15</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*, pp. 5, 6, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Beate Jahn, *Liberal internationalism: theory, history, practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 193; Dunne and McDonald, ‘The politics of liberal internationalism’, pp. 11, 13; Rabinovich, ‘The case of restraint’.

<sup>17</sup> Kupchan and Trubowitz, ‘Dead center’, pp. 25, 44; Rabinovich, ‘The case of restraint’; Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*, p. 1.

way for the development of competing democratic powers like the BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.<sup>18</sup>

Yet this success, liberal internationalists argued, also provided the resources for reform—for a new grand strategy of democratic internationalism. The ‘realization of the worldwide triumph of the liberal vision is within reach’, they claimed, because now ‘the obstacles are located primarily within the democratic world’.<sup>19</sup> In other words, liberal internationalism, despite its shortcomings, successfully removed any major external threat or competitor, thereby paving the way for the necessary internal reforms. In order to realize these reforms, the US has to recognize that the times of exceptionalism and unchallenged leadership are over. Democratic internationalism entails the recognition that liberal internationalism has its ‘roots in social democratic ideals’ that compensate the inevitable losers of a capitalist economy and cushion its divisive tendencies.<sup>20</sup> It also requires a move towards more collaboration and burden-sharing with other democracies and the readiness to pay attention to, and learn from, their experiences in order to revitalize democracy and citizen participation at home.<sup>21</sup> And it has to develop foreign policy tools that work more by way of example and ‘pull’ than by imposition and ‘push’.<sup>22</sup> In short, the liberalization of the international sphere was seen as the precondition for a revival of liberalism at home and, in turn, the spread of democratic internationalism abroad—both as a result of the removal of external threats.

Alas, the Brexit vote, the Trump election, and the rise of populist movements more generally challenge this analysis in two core respects. First, they run counter to the claim that the current crisis is not one of liberal principles but of American authority. Current populist movements undermine core liberal principles in the domestic sphere. Though they generate more citizen participation, they do so through rallies and referendums rather than liberal democracy. They also challenge the rule of law by attacking judges or wilfully subjecting them to political interests. They make nationalism, racism, misogyny and attacks on minorities respectable again.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, these policies cannot be attributed to a crisis of American authority alone. While American high-handedness may indeed have played a role in the current crisis, the distribution of these populist movements suggests a deeper problem. Much of the British population is unhappy with European, not American, policies. Germany has a populist movement despite the fact that it practises more redistributive social democratic policies than the United States and weathered the last economic crisis rather well. Both Donald Trump and Marine le Pen in France are flirting with Russia and other authoritarian states. Populist practices, rather than liberal democracy, are spreading in countries with very different democratic traditions.

<sup>18</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*, pp. 3, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*, pp. 1, 8; Ikenberry, ‘Introduction’, p. 16; Kupchan and Trubowitz, ‘Dead center’; Nick Bromell and John Tirman, *Recovering the liberal foreign policy tradition* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Center for International Studies, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*, pp. 6, 8.

<sup>22</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Derek Sayer, ‘White riot: Brexit, Trump, and post-factual politics’, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 30: 1, 2007, p. 102.

Second, rather than building on the achievements of liberal internationalism, populist movements systematically target and aim to dismantle these achievements. They attack multilateralism and put ‘America [or Britain, or France] first’; they prioritize national over international law, citizenship over human rights; they cooperate with authoritarian regimes; they drop free trade agreements, withdraw from free trade blocs and pursue protectionist policies; they attempt to block migration and travel, and thus build walls rather than bridges between states. Today’s populist movements, in short, are rebelling against the globalized liberal world order—and thus liberal internationalism’s greatest achievement.<sup>24</sup>

We are thus confronted with two radically different takes on the current crisis and its solutions. While liberal internationalists trace its roots to arrogant American foreign policies and view a reformed democratic internationalism as the solution, populists identify liberal elites as the problem and aim to solve it by discarding liberal principles. Despite these fundamental differences, however, the relationship between the domestic and international spheres plays a crucial role in both narratives. In both cases, the nature of the international order determines the possibilities of domestic development. An assessment of the prospects of liberal internationalism thus has to come to grips with the relationship between domestic and international politics in and for liberalism.

## The international in liberal theory

Liberalism is generally taken to denote a particular form of government characterized by individual rights, the rule of law, private property and the political participation of the population—that is, a form of domestic politics. These domestic liberal principles may then be extended into the international sphere. Yet both liberal internationalists and contemporary populist movements turn this sequence on its head when they treat a liberal international sphere either as a precondition for the reform and further development of domestic liberalism or as a crucial barrier to domestic (national) development. Turning to the work of the seventeenth-century philosopher John Locke, I will show that the separation of, and dynamic relationship between, the domestic and the international spheres is, in fact, a constitutive element of liberalism.

Liberalism is a complex cultural phenomenon, ‘a complex of elements associated in historical reality which we unite into a conceptual whole from the standpoint of their cultural significance’.<sup>25</sup> Liberalism, therefore, does not have a founder, and its individual elements have their own histories; nevertheless, Locke is widely regarded as (one of) the first thinker(s) to bring its different elements together into a coherent whole that subsequently inspired a powerful political movement.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Craig Calhoun, ‘Brexit is a mutiny against the cosmopolitan elite’, *New Perspectives Quarterly* 33: 3, July 2016, pp. 50–8.

<sup>25</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (London: Unwin, 1984), p. 47.

<sup>26</sup> John Gray, *Liberalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 11; Andrzej Rapaczynski, *Nature and politics: liberalism in the philosophies of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 6, 14; C. B. MacPherson, *The political theory of possessive individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 262. This does not mean that Locke’s work provides the starting-point for a ‘linear history of

The work of Locke thus provides a point of entry into the study of liberalism. Moreover, Locke wrote before the existence of liberal polities and thus explicitly formulated the policies necessary to establish liberalism—including, I will show, the crucial role of the international.

In response to the general crisis of the seventeenth century that had undermined the political, religious, intellectual and economic order in Europe in general and England in particular, Locke set out to develop a new conception of politics. He began by positing a self-evident principle, namely that the state of nature of all men is ‘a *State of perfect Freedom* to order their Actions, and dispose of their Possessions, and Persons as they think fit’.<sup>27</sup> In order to uphold this freedom, human beings needed to preserve themselves.<sup>28</sup> This requirement could be fulfilled, Locke argued, if ‘every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person*’ and ‘the *Labour* of his Body and the *Work* of his Hands’.<sup>29</sup> Self-possession, envisaged as property in one’s person and the fruit of one’s labour, thus allows individuals ‘the taking any part of what is common, and removing it out of the state Nature leaves it in, which *begins the Property*’.<sup>30</sup> According to Locke, this natural right to private property does not only underpin and uphold the life of the individual who would otherwise perish;<sup>31</sup> it also makes the individual independent of others for his survival and thus establishes his freedom. This natural freedom of the individual then militates against absolute government. ‘Men are naturally free, and the Examples of History [show] that the Governments of the World ... had their beginning laid on that foundation, and were made by the Consent of the people’.<sup>32</sup> And since this freedom is based on property, the ‘great and *chief end* therefore [of government] is *the Preservation of their Property*’.<sup>33</sup>

According to Locke’s theory, then, the three core principles of liberal thought are private property, individual freedom and government by consent. These principles still lie at the core of most conceptions of liberalism. Today they are embodied in the market economy, human rights and democracy. Crucially, however, in Locke’s theory these principles are mutually constitutive: private property constitutes individual freedom, and individual freedom requires government by consent; and the main task of government, in turn, is the protection of private property, which completes the circle by upholding individual freedom.

This theoretical core indeed suggests that liberalism is first and foremost concerned with domestic politics. And yet it turned out that this vision of domestic politics could not be realized in practice because it did not reflect the social and political conditions prevailing in Locke’s time. Most people simply had no private

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the unfolding of liberal thought’, but rather that it includes core elements and dynamics of liberalism that are subsequently developed and adjusted to particular circumstances in space and time: see Andreas Kalyvas and Ira Katznelson, *Liberal beginnings: making a republic for the moderns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 117.

<sup>27</sup> John Locke, *Two treatises of government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 269.

<sup>28</sup> Locke, *Two treatises*, p. 271.

<sup>29</sup> Locke, *Two treatises*, pp. 287–8.

<sup>30</sup> Locke, *Two treatises*, p. 289.

<sup>31</sup> Locke, *Two treatises*, pp. 289, 294.

<sup>32</sup> Locke, *Two treatises*, p. 336.

<sup>33</sup> Locke, *Two treatises*, p. 351.

property, and most governments were not based on consent. Rather than an analysis of reality, therefore, this was a normative theory—offering a political model to be realized. To this end, Locke had to develop a political strategy for the realization of liberalism in a non-liberal environment. And in this strategy, the international sphere played a crucial role.

If private property was the basis of individual freedom, Locke argued, property owners would demand that government protect private property and hence their freedom. He thus advocated the extension of full political rights to property owners—and their denial to those who did not own property. ‘*Paternal Power* is ... where Minority makes the Child incapable to manage his property; *Political* where Men have Property in their own disposal; and *Despotal* over such as have no property at all.’<sup>34</sup>

Yet limiting political rights to property owners contradicted Locke’s claim that, in principle, all people were born free and equal and thus had a right to consent to government. Hence Locke was interested in extending the franchise, and he argued that this could be achieved by providing private property, ideally, to all members of society, who would thus be constituted as free individuals in the liberal sense and would in turn support liberal political and economic institutions. This solution, however, raised the question of where all this additional property was to come from. Private property was, after all, protected and could therefore not be redistributed. So Locke argued that because private property was more productive than common property and thus of greater benefit to all of humankind,<sup>35</sup> common property could be turned into private property: God gave the land ‘to the use of the Industrious and Rational’.<sup>36</sup> People could simply attain property by mixing their individual labour with the original common property. The privatization of common property was thus the solution to the problem.

This in turn created a new problem, namely that land—at the time the most important additional source of wealth—in England was too scarce to provide the vast and rising number of poor with property. So Locke looked abroad: ‘Yet there are still *great Tracts of Ground* to be found, which ... *lie waste*, and are more than the People who dwell on it, do, or can make use of, and so still lie in common.’<sup>37</sup> It was this common land in America which could be used, at least in principle, to furnish all individuals with property and thus make them eligible for full political rights. The establishment of liberalism thus required policies of colonialism, which Locke’s writings—political and theoretical—consistently advocate and defend.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Locke, *Two treatises*, p. 384.

<sup>35</sup> Locke, *Two treatises*, pp. 296–8.

<sup>36</sup> Locke, *Two treatises*, p. 291.

<sup>37</sup> Locke, *Two treatises*, p. 299.

<sup>38</sup> James Tully, *An approach to political philosophy: Locke in contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 140–41; Richard Tuck, *The rights of war and peace: political thought and the international order from Grotius to Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 167; Barbara Arneil, *John Locke and America: the defense of English colonialism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); David Armitage, ‘John Locke, Carolina, and the *Two treatises of government*’, *Political Theory* 32: 5, 2004, pp. 602–27; David Boucher, ‘Property and propriety in international relations: the case of John Locke’, in Beate Jahn, ed., *Classical theory in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 156–77.

The solution to Locke's conundrum—that the constitution of liberalism required the spread of private property, and yet private property could not be redistributed because it had to be protected as the basis of individual freedom—thus lay in the international sphere. It lay in the possibility of appropriating other people's property; and this in turn required power politics. In other words, the constitution of domestic liberalism required a sharp distinction between two different political spheres: the domestic sphere, governed by the rule of law and liberal principles, and the international sphere, characterized by power politics.

To summarize: according to Lockean theory, the core principles of liberalism are individual freedom, private property and government by consent. The core policies necessary to establish a society based on these principles are, first, the privatization of common property (and hence the expropriation of communities whose livelihood depends on that common property); and second, since those communities cannot be supposed to have any interest in their own expropriation, the extension of political rights to property owners only—and their denial to those who do not own property.

These policies of appropriation and expropriation, emancipation and oppression, clearly give rise to tensions within society—between those who benefit from privatization and those who lose; between those who gain political rights and those who don't. These tensions, and the lack of sufficient common land for privatization in the domestic sphere, put limits on the pursuit of liberal policies. The solution to this problem lay in the international sphere—where land held in common was plentiful, and its appropriation/colonization did not exacerbate the tensions within domestic society but on the contrary helped relieve them. In theory, therefore, the relationship between the domestic and the international functions like a safety valve that allows the import of economic benefits from the international sphere and the export of political tensions from the domestic sphere. The question for the next section therefore is whether and how this theoretical logic played itself out historically.

## **The international in liberal history**

This section provides a (necessarily brief) historical account of the establishment and development of liberalism—with particular attention to the relationship between the domestic and the international. It shows that the policies outlined in Locke's theory do, indeed, lie at the core of liberalism. The historical development of liberalism confirms the liberal internationalists' assertion that the current crisis is a crisis of success. But it also shows that this paradoxical dynamic is a constitutive part of liberalism and not just a problem of American authority.

The crisis of the seventeenth century, which had loosened many of the rigid bonds of British society, was followed by protoliberal developments. While the lower classes were widely interested in keeping and institutionalizing the new freedoms,<sup>39</sup> men such as Locke's own employer, the Earl of Shaftesbury, who had

<sup>39</sup> Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: the hidden agenda of modernity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990),

made fortunes of their own (often through overseas trade), demanded political rights with direct reference to their property—leading to a huge increase in the number of members of the House of Commons.<sup>40</sup> The political representation of these property-holders resulted in the establishment of a liberal state characterized by the transference of *de jure* political power into the hands of commercial and capitalistic interests and the stabilization of property rights in seventeenth-century Britain.<sup>41</sup> Hence, just as Locke had argued, private property constituted individual freedom which in turn provided the basis for government by consent.

Once in power, this ruling elite systematically pursued the privatization of common property, justified by reference to improved productivity. Locke's work was frequently cited in parliament in support of private enclosure Acts which, between 1710 and 1815, transferred 20 per cent of the total land from common into private property.<sup>42</sup> This large-scale privatization of common land led, within the domestic sphere, to the impoverishment of wide sections of society and thus to upheavals, rebellions and the threat of revolution.<sup>43</sup> Thus protoliberal policies did not just constitute free liberal individuals—they simultaneously constituted non-liberal forces that could not be expected to uphold private property rights and therefore had to be denied political rights.<sup>44</sup> In short, the realization of liberal principles produced a society that was deeply divided, both economically and politically.

Right from the start these tensions were relieved, to some extent, through colonialism. Locke's justification of colonialism was widely used by 'preachers, legal theorists, and politicians' to base first the land claims of the British colonists and then those of the American citizens on the enclosure and cultivation of indigenous land.<sup>45</sup> The same argument was also influential in Australia, Canada and New Zealand well into the nineteenth century.<sup>46</sup> Colonialism allowed the European elites to appropriate 'foreign' land, thus easing the economic burden on the domestic poor. It also provided an opportunity for the poor to emigrate; and it allowed the government to export its poor, its criminals, its orphans, as well as to offer employment for the middle and higher classes in the administration of the colonies, thus easing political pressure on domestic government.<sup>47</sup> Most

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pp. 120–21; Tim Di Muzio, 'The liberal Renaissance and the ends of history', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 15: 2, 2012, pp. 158–76.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Perelman, *The invention of capitalism: classical political economy and the secret history of primitive accumulation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 175; Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Economic origins of dictatorship and democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 350.

<sup>41</sup> Acemoglu and Robinson, *Economic origins*, pp. 349–50.

<sup>42</sup> David McNally, *Political economy and the rise of capitalism: a reinterpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 62, 8–9; Perelman, *The invention of capitalism*, p. 175. McNally reports that the first private enclosure Act was presented in parliament in 1710, followed by 100 between 1720 and 1750, 139 between 1750 and 1760, 900 between 1760 and 1779, and 2,000 between 1793 and 1815 (p. 11).

<sup>43</sup> Charles Tilly, *Contention and democracy in Europe, 1650–2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Kyung-won Kim, 'Marx, Schumpeter, and the east Asian experience', *Journal of Democracy* 3: 3, 1992, p. 24.

<sup>44</sup> Adam Przeworski, 'The neoliberal fallacy', *Journal of Democracy* 3: 3, 1992, p. 53; Marc F. Plattner, *Democracy without borders: global challenges to liberal democracy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), pp. 64–5.

<sup>45</sup> Arneil, *John Locke*, p. 169.

<sup>46</sup> Duncan Ivison, *Postcolonial liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 93.

<sup>47</sup> John Darwin, *The empire project: the rise and fall of the British world system, 1830–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 3; Christopher Alan Bayly, *Imperial meridian: the British Empire and the world, 1780–1830* (London: Longman, 1989), p. 86.

importantly for the subsequent political development of settler nations like the United States, however, colonialism provided common political ground: namely, an interest in expropriating foreign land, and hence a commitment to the principle of private property which justified this expropriation—for rich and poor alike—and thus bridged the gap between their otherwise mutually exclusive interests.

Yet while these colonial enterprises served to relieve some of the tensions in the domestic sphere, they also created new ones. Competition between empires—often generated by local interests and private pressures—during the eighteenth century led to extremely expensive wars that were fought out all over the globe. And it was the attempt to pay for these wars by increasing taxes that exacerbated the already existing tensions between rich and poor in domestic society and played a major role in triggering the revolutions of the late eighteenth century. In France the Revolution forced the ruling elites to widen the franchise.<sup>48</sup> In the American colonies, many of the settlers had private property but did not enjoy the same political rights (such as consenting to taxes) as their peers in the mother country. Hence they fought for political independence—the right to sovereignty.<sup>49</sup> At the start of the nineteenth century, in short, the domestic and international tensions created by liberal policies reached breaking point—in the form of domestic revolutions and the fragmentation of empires, not only in the British colonies in North America but also in much of Latin America.<sup>50</sup>

This age of revolution gave rise to new forms of thinking about politics<sup>51</sup> that found expression in the ‘rights of man’<sup>52</sup>—the right to life, liberty and property, or to the pursuit of happiness—and provided the foundation for the formulation of human rights that today play such a crucial role in liberal thought and practice. Both in America and in France these rights were codified in new constitutions and provided the basis for individual liberty, in the form of rights to political participation in the domestic sphere, as well as for ‘national’ liberty, or the right to ‘sovereignty’ in the international sphere. Though universal in their formulation and aspiration, these rights were quite particular in their application. While the French Revolution led to an extension of the franchise, equal political rights were still denied to women, the non-propertied sections of society, the colonial population in St Domingue and European populations that came under French rule in the course of the Napoleonic wars. The Revolution also led to the crowning of Napoleon as emperor and the pursuit of empire-building both within and, less successfully, outside Europe.<sup>53</sup> Independent Brazil, too, set itself up as an empire and excluded

<sup>48</sup> Theda Skocpol and Meyer Kestenbaum, ‘Mars unshackled: the French Revolution in world historical perspective’, in Ferenc Feher, ed., *The French Revolution and the birth of modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 17; Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in world history: power and the politics of difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 220; Anthony McFarlane, *The British in the Americas, 1480–1815* (London: Longman, 1994), p. 302.

<sup>49</sup> Burbank and Cooper, *Empires*, p. 220.

<sup>50</sup> David Armitage, *Foundations of modern international thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 215–16.

<sup>51</sup> Christopher Alan Bayly, ‘The age of revolutions in global context: an afterword’, in David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds, *The age of revolutions in global context* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 212–13.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Paine, *The rights of man, common sense, and other political writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>53</sup> McFarlane, *The British*, pp. 274, 272.

vast sections of the population from political rights.<sup>54</sup> Threatened by the military and ideological challenges of the French Revolution and fearful of social upheaval, Britain entered a new phase of imperial expansion.<sup>55</sup> And American independence led to an 'empire of liberty' that included slavery and the denial of rights to indigenous populations as well as the pursuit of westward expansion.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, when westward expansion was completed towards the end of the nineteenth century, the United States joined other imperial powers—at the time engaged in the scramble for Africa—in the construction of its own overseas empire.<sup>57</sup> These policies were largely motivated by and 'operated as a massive scheme of economic redistribution ... that lined the pockets of a privileged class of traders and investors'.<sup>58</sup> There was, then, nothing exceptional about American foreign policy.

The nineteenth century, in sum, was characterized by the contradictory political principles of political freedom and its denial, of sovereignty and imperialism.<sup>59</sup> Empire-building was a liberal enterprise systematically supported by liberal international lawyers and political thinkers alike.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the principle of layered sovereignty so characteristic of empire was confirmed by the Berlin Conference as late as 1884–5.<sup>61</sup> And the idea of an international order based on nation-states was not codified until the UN Charter of 1948, and largely realized only in the 1970s after decolonization.<sup>62</sup>

In the course of the nineteenth century, liberal elites were forced into a variety of political and economic compromises. In Europe, the industrial revolution led to heightened exploitation of workers as well as the widespread constitution of workers' movements.<sup>63</sup> But it also generated economic growth and the development of a sizeable middle class.<sup>64</sup> The combined political pressure from workers' movements and 'liberal' middle classes led to widespread if short-lived revolutions in the middle of the nineteenth century and forced the ruling elites to make a

<sup>54</sup> Burbank and Cooper, *Empires*, pp. 220–21.

<sup>55</sup> McFarlane, *The British*, pp. 306, 285.

<sup>56</sup> McFarlane, *The British*, p. 281.

<sup>57</sup> See e.g. Julian Go, *Patterns of empire: the British and American empires, 1688 to the present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>58</sup> Paul K. MacDonald, 'Those who forget historiography are doomed to republish it: empire, imperialism and contemporary debates about American power', *Review of International Studies* 35: 1, 2009, p. 61; John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, 'The imperialism of free trade', *Economic History Review* 6: 1, 1953; Moyn, 'Soft sells'.

<sup>59</sup> Lauren Benton, *A search for sovereignty: law and geography in European empires, 1400–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 4; Jeppe Mulich, 'Empire and violence: continuity in the age of revolution', *Political Power and Social Theory* 32, 2017, pp. 181–204.

<sup>60</sup> Anthony Anghi, *Imperialism, sovereignty, and the making of international law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Beate Jahn, 'Kant, Mill, and illiberal legacies in international affairs', *International Organization* 59: 1, Winter 2005, pp. 177–207, and 'Barbarian thoughts: imperialism in the philosophy of John Stuart Mill', *Review of International Studies* 31: 3, pp. 599–618.

<sup>61</sup> Andrew Fitzmaurice, *Sovereignty, property, empire, 1500–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 28, 7.

<sup>62</sup> Burbank and Cooper, *Empires*, p. 183; Armitage, *Foundations*, p. 21.

<sup>63</sup> Arturo Fontaine Talavera, 'The future of an illusion', *Journal of Democracy* 3: 3, 1992, p. 113; Robert B. Marks, *The origins of the modern world: fate and fortune in the rise of the West* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007); David Washbrook, 'From comparative sociology to global history: Britain and India in the pre-history of modernity', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 40: 4, 1997, pp. 410–43.

<sup>64</sup> Adam Przeworski, Michael E. Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub and Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and development: political institutions and well-being in the world, 1950–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Acemoglu and Robinson, *Economic origins*, p. 58.

number of concessions. These included the lowering of the property threshold for voting rights and thus a gradual extension of political rights to the middle class. Workers, meanwhile, were provided with economic concessions in the form of welfare legislation (Germany) or factory regulation (Britain). These social democratic forms of redistribution thus do not constitute ‘roots’ of liberalism;<sup>65</sup> they are, rather, the results of considerable political pressure.

The absence of this pressure explains the divergent development in settler states such as America. The manpower necessary to conquer and settle such huge areas of territory was provided through large-scale immigration and motivated by promises of land ownership. Consequently, settler societies were characterized by a relatively wide distribution of property, by alternatives to industrial work, and by the common political interest in the expropriation of the indigenous population and thus a commitment to the protection of private property underpinning these policies. Hence, the political pressure to introduce social democratic forms of redistribution was largely missing in settler states.<sup>66</sup>

Despite these political and economic compromises, however, by the end of the nineteenth century liberal states had managed to create the first liberal world order, consisting of a highly integrated world economy, based on liberal interests and the extension of formal or informal rule by liberal states to virtually all parts of the globe, and enforced by the most powerful liberal state of the time—Britain. Yet it was precisely this success that quickly turned into a major crisis and the fragmentation of this liberal world order. With no space left for external expansion—for the import of economic benefits and the export of political problems—the tensions and contradictions of liberalism played themselves out within that liberal world order. They produced three major fault-lines. First, they intensified competition between liberal states for colonies, which played an important role in the run-up to the First World War. Second, the contradictions between political freedom for some populations and the political oppression of others were now embodied within liberal empires and led to independence movements in the colonies. Third, the First World War and its aftermath led to heightened protectionism, a major economic crisis and rising economic inequality. The liberal economic dynamic of appropriation through expropriation thus played itself out in the domestic sphere where it fed fascism and communism—anti-liberal forces on the right and on the left—and led to revolution in Russia as well as the introduction of universal suffrage in most European states. The first liberal world order, in short, succumbed to the internal contradictions of liberalism in the course of the Second World War—giving way to a bipolar system and the Cold War.

This comprehensive crisis catapulted the United States into the leading role. The First World War severely weakened European powers and generated serious anxiety about the future of race relations, particularly in the United States.<sup>67</sup> Woodrow Wilson, often seen as the author of American liberal internationalism,

<sup>65</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*, p. 17.

<sup>67</sup> Robert Vitalis, *White world order, black power politics: the birth of American international relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

combined the latter with a systematic ‘liberal imperialism’ in theory and practice.<sup>68</sup> Again, however, it was the fear of external threats (the spectre of the Soviet Union and the rise of communism and fascism in Europe) and internal revolution (the global economic crisis and increasing poverty) that finally led to the implementation of the New Deal and hence the adoption of social democratic forms of redistribution in America as well.<sup>69</sup>

On the basis of this experience, the United States began to develop and implement what we now call liberal internationalism after the Second World War. These policies were driven by US interest in the consolidation and spread of capitalism in general and stable markets in Europe in particular. This required the containment of the Soviet Union and the communist alternative it offered—both to newly independent states in the developing world and to dissatisfied populations in core liberal states.<sup>70</sup> These dangers created bipartisan support for economic aid in the form of the Marshall Plan for Europe, for the institutionalization of liberal economic principles through the Bretton Woods institutions, for the United Nations as a means to check aggression, for development aid integrating newly independent states into the liberal capitalist camp, and for the promotion of democracy and human rights.<sup>71</sup> The ‘embedded liberalism’ of the postwar period ensured and expanded free trade while providing individual states with the opportunity to develop public welfare provision and to regulate employment.<sup>72</sup> This post-Second World War liberal internationalism thus consisted in extending liberal principles, practices and institutions into the international sphere as a means to consolidate, strengthen and expand the liberal camp.

Yet this extension of liberal principles was again accompanied by political oppression and expropriation. While the United States promoted democracy in principle, it equally systematically intervened to suppress the political rights of populations with (supposedly) non-liberal inclinations and propped up dictators who implemented and guaranteed liberal economic principles and/or provided support for the ‘liberal’ side in the Cold War.<sup>73</sup> Redistributive economic policies were abandoned in response to the economic downturn of the 1970s and replaced with a remarkable revival of *laissez-faire* liberalism in the form of market economics, the privatization of state-owned industries and the trimming of welfare benefits by liberal democracies.<sup>74</sup> Such neo-liberal economic policies were also extended into the international sphere. Liberalization, deregulation and privatization—that is,

<sup>68</sup> Ikenberry, ‘Introduction’, pp. 10–14.

<sup>69</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*, p. 21.

<sup>70</sup> Edward L. Morse, *Modernization and the transformation of international relations* (New York: Free Press, 1976), p. 2; Walt Whitman Rostow, *The stages of economic growth: a non-communist manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 166; Odd Arne Westad, *The global Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 26–7; Kupchan and Trubowitz, ‘Dead center’, pp. 15, 17.

<sup>71</sup> Kupchan and Trubowitz, ‘Dead center’, pp. 16, 17.

<sup>72</sup> Ikenberry, ‘Introduction’, p. 16.

<sup>73</sup> Robert A. Packenham, *Liberal America and the Third World: political development ideas in foreign aid and social science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 146. For a more detailed discussion of modernization theories and policies, see Beate Jahn, ‘The tragedy of liberal diplomacy: democratization, intervention, statebuilding (part I)’, *Journal of International Relations and Development* 1: 1, March 2007, pp. 87–106.

<sup>74</sup> Plattner, *Democracy*, p. 68; Chris May, *A global political economy of intellectual property rights* (London: Routledge, 2000).

the expropriation of common property and the removal of protections for vulnerable populations—provided the core of the ‘Washington Consensus’ imposed by the IMF, the World Bank and the US Treasury on developing countries. The results of these policies were often disastrous—increasing poverty and inequality, feeding political unrest.<sup>75</sup>

But it was the emergence of a second liberal world order after the end of the Cold War that undermined the domestic/international divide which allows liberalism to manage these tensions—and thus undermined liberalism itself, above all in core liberal states. The demise of the Soviet Union and with it the absence of a serious external (political, economic and ideological) threat eroded the bipartisan consensus in liberal polities and led to the fragmentation of the political landscape, with extreme parties on the right and on the left gaining power.<sup>76</sup> With liberal capitalism the only game in town, the need for political or economic compromise in the domestic sphere was gone. The much despised ‘cosmopolitan establishment’<sup>77</sup> could now pursue its economic interests unimpeded across the globe. Further dismantling of welfare states was followed by austerity policies after the financial crisis of 2008, and economic inequality took on obscene dimensions. Instead of protecting domestic populations in core liberal states from the inevitable downside of capitalism by importing and redistributing economic benefits from the international sphere, these populations now experienced the exact opposite: the export of investment and jobs into the international sphere.

Economic globalization and the rise of inequality, along with civil wars and military interventions that often exacerbated these conflicts,<sup>78</sup> increased refugee flows and migration. Thus, instead of being able to export political conflicts, populations in core liberal states saw themselves confronted with the import of political tensions in the form of refugees and migrants. And the ‘globalization’ of human rights law and policies challenged the hitherto privileged citizenship rights and identities of majority populations in core liberal states. The erosion of the domestic/international divide thus undermined the economic, political and ideological basis of domestic liberalism and generated resistance: the anti-globalization movement, the ‘Occupy’ movement, and various populist movements and parties.

The establishment of a liberal world order also undermined the crucial distinction between a liberal and a non-liberal camp that had informed, and was used to justify, liberal foreign policies. In the absence of a serious non-liberal camp, policies of liberal cooperation and integration fell apart. The Iraq War was backed not by a liberal alliance, such as NATO, but by a ‘coalition of the willing’—states motivated by a variety of interests (ranging from aid to American support in other matters). Multilateralism lost support in many liberal states. Humanitarian intervention and democracy promotion were selectively undertaken and openly

<sup>75</sup> Stanley Hoffmann, *America goes backward* (New York: Review Books, 2004), p. 177.

<sup>76</sup> Kupchan and Trubowitz, ‘Dead center’.

<sup>77</sup> Calhoun, ‘Brexit’.

<sup>78</sup> Beate Jahn, ‘The tragedy of liberal diplomacy: democratization, intervention, statebuilding (part II)’, *Journal of International Relations and Development* 1: 2, June 2007, pp. 215–19.

justified with reference to the interests of powerful states,<sup>79</sup> undermining liberal principles such as the commitment to stop genocide<sup>80</sup>—and generating resistance within target populations.<sup>81</sup> The selective adherence to human rights (Guantanamo Bay) and international law in general (Iraq) and accusations of bias (ICC) undermine the standing of international law. In the absence of an alternative to capitalism, protectionism and the consequent competition between liberal states are on the rise. Increasing economic inequality within and between states belies the liberal promise of general prosperity and generates increasing resistance to further liberalization on the part of developing states (as in the WTO Doha Round).

The current crisis, in sum, follows the logic of liberalism's constitution and historical development. In order to manage the tensions and fragmenting dynamics between its winners and losers, liberalism established a clear distinction between the domestic and the international political spheres—projecting the dark side of its policies into the international sphere as a precondition for realizing its promises in the domestic sphere. Ironically, however, the successful spread of liberal principles and practices into the international sphere undermines this divide and with it the basis of liberalism itself.

## Conclusion: the prospects of democratic internationalism

Advocates of liberal internationalism are highly perceptive when they note that the current crisis is rooted in the overwhelming success—rather than failure—of liberal internationalism. It was indeed the 'triumph' of liberalism over its Cold War competitor and the resultant liberal world order that engendered this crisis. But they underestimate the nature and significance of this success and thus also misjudge the prospects of a reformed democratic internationalism.

The success of post-1945 American foreign policy, they argue, fed American hubris, arrogance and exceptionalism, which in turn found expression in insensitive and high-handed policies that ultimately undermined the community of liberal states and contributed to a shift of power relations away from the United States and its European allies.<sup>82</sup> The same success, in this view, also lay behind the aggressive spread of 'fundamentalist capitalism', creating the very inequalities that now feed resistance against globalization, free trade, banks and common markets.<sup>83</sup> The logic of this analysis, however, suggests that the current crisis can be resolved with no more than a helping of humble pie. The United States has to recognize and accept that there exist different models of democracy, that liberalism can thrive only if it practises a social democratic and thus more equitable form of capitalism, that America must respect the sovereignty of other states,

<sup>79</sup> Tony Blair, 'The Blair Doctrine', speech delivered in Chicago, 22 April 1999, <https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/154/26026.html>.

<sup>80</sup> Dunne and McDonald, 'The politics of liberal internationalism', p. 12.

<sup>81</sup> Carothers, 'Taking stock'; Roland Paris, *At war's end: building peace after civil conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 185–204, 209.

<sup>82</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*, p. 5; Dunne and McDonald, 'The politics of liberal internationalism', pp. 7, 9.

<sup>83</sup> Dunne and McDonald, 'The politics of liberal internationalism', pp. 11, 13.

abide by international law and respect human rights at home if it wants to spread them abroad. Today, the prospects of this democratic internationalism, proponents argue, are ‘unprecedented’ because liberalism does not face a serious external threat and is therefore free to pursue the necessary ‘internal reforms’.<sup>84</sup>

This analysis overlooks the key point that the success of liberal internationalism depends on this very distinction between inside and outside, domestic and international, liberal and non-liberal spheres. The establishment of liberalism requires, and historically has systematically entailed, both appropriation and expropriation, political emancipation and political oppression. Indeed, as Ikenberry notes, the United States rejected treaties, violated rules, ignored allies and used military force ‘in every historical period’—just as it also respected some rules and allies. Such contradictory behaviour is therefore neither the result of ‘an occasional ad hoc policy decision’ nor the expression of an ‘illiberal’ foreign policy.<sup>85</sup> It is, rather, an integral feature of liberalism—and hence also part of a reformed democratic internationalism<sup>86</sup>—that creates tensions and conflict in society. The separation of the domestic and international spheres enabled liberal actors to manage these fragmenting tendencies: it allowed them to pursue expropriation abroad and redistribution at home, to practise power politics abroad and political emancipation at home. And these differential principles governing domestic and international politics were justified through nationalist, racist, developmentalist ideologies that asserted the superiority of domestic over foreign populations.<sup>87</sup>

In a liberal world order, populations in core liberal states no longer experience the import of economic benefits from abroad but instead see them being exported in the form of investment and jobs. Similarly, political conflicts, instead of being exported, now find their way into the domestic sphere, in the form of refugees, migrants or terrorists. At the same time, traditional identities based on the superiority of particular nations, races, genders, religions or sexualities are delegitimated by the globalization of human rights.

The erosion of the domestic/international divide thus destroys the liberal consensus within society. Socio-economic cleavages are widening;<sup>88</sup> extreme parties on the right and the left are getting stronger;<sup>89</sup> nationalism, racism and sexism are becoming respectable again; and the very ideas of reason, truth, science and expertise upon which liberal claims were traditionally based are under attack.<sup>90</sup>

Most importantly, however, today’s populist movements explicitly identify liberal internationalism as the cause of the problem. They despise multilateralism,

<sup>84</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*, p. 6.

<sup>85</sup> Ikenberry, ‘Introduction’, p. 7.

<sup>86</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*, p. 19; Andrew Phillips, ‘The wars on terror, duelling internationalisms and the clash of purposes in a post-unipolar world’, *International Politics* 50: 1, 2013, p. 82; Dunne and McDonald, ‘The politics of liberal internationalism’, p. 5.

<sup>87</sup> See e.g. Jahn, ‘Barbarian thoughts’; Anghi, *Imperialism*.

<sup>88</sup> Kupchan and Trubowitz, ‘Dead center’, pp. 35–6.

<sup>89</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*, p. 4. See also e.g. Robert J. Lieber, ‘Staying power and the American future: problems of primacy, policy, and grand strategy’, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 34: 4, 2011, pp. 509–30; Paul K. MacDonald and Joseph M. Parent, ‘Graceful decline? The surprising success of Great Power retrenchment’, *International Security* 35: 4, 2011, pp. 7–44; Rabinovich, ‘The case of restraint’.

<sup>90</sup> Sayer, ‘White riot’, pp. 92, 102.

refuse to cooperate with international organizations, and (try to) leave the EU; they drop free trade agreements and pursue protectionist policies; they prioritize domestic over international law, citizenship over human rights; they pursue travel bans and try to stop migration; they put ‘America first’ or ‘take back control’.<sup>91</sup> All these policies serve but one goal: to re-establish a clear distinction between the domestic and the international sphere by building (ideological, legal or physical) walls between nations. They aim to return to a time when this distinction ensured political consensus, economic prosperity and a privileged identity through the exercise of power politics in the international sphere.

If this analysis is correct, then the survival of liberalism—and by extension the prospects of a democratic internationalism—depends on the emergence or construction of a serious external and/or internal threat. The core characteristics that we associate with liberalism today—democracy, prosperity, equality before the law—are historically the result of ‘significant social conflict and possible threat of revolution’ that forced liberal elites to give up a greater share of political rights and economic benefits.<sup>92</sup> In the absence of such political pressure, the spread of democracy does not provide the basis for cooperation and burden-sharing, as democratic internationalists argue.<sup>93</sup> On the contrary, democratic states have to provide economic benefits to the majority of their populations.<sup>94</sup> Democratization thus entails increasing pressure to secure a larger share of material benefits on the world market, which leads to competition rather than cooperation between democratic states.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, in the absence of political pressure, liberal elites have no reason to engage in social democratic forms of redistribution. Even the few reforms triggered by the recent financial crisis are already being targeted for ‘rollback’.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, without the political pressure to integrate a ‘liberal’ camp, the diversity of immigrant societies such as the United States does not provide opportunities to build bridges between states, as democratic internationalists argue.<sup>97</sup> Instead, it is widely perceived as a source of economic competition and cultural conflict. Finally, the lack of a serious military threat does not pave the way for bipartisan cooperation in the domestic sphere or security cooperation in the international sphere: instead, it removes the reasons for such cooperation. Hence, in facing contemporary terrorism—itself a product of the global liberal order and thus a phenomenon that traverses the domestic/international divide—the United States did not require the same kind of cooperation from its allies as the stand-off between the superpowers during the Cold War demanded.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Sayer, ‘White riot’, p. 102.

<sup>92</sup> Acemoglu and Robinson, *Economic origins*, p. 29; Kim, ‘Marx’, p. 24.

<sup>93</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*, p. 6.

<sup>94</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*, p. 18.

<sup>95</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*, pp. 8–9, 5–7.

<sup>96</sup> Amie Tsang, ‘Morning agenda: Dodd–Frank rollback, Bridgewater culture, household gains’, *New York Times*, 14 Sept. 2016, [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/15/business/dealbook/dodd-frank-banking-bridgewater-economy.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FFinancial%20Legal%2FRegulatory&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics&region=stream&module=stream\\_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=9&pgtype=collection&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/15/business/dealbook/dodd-frank-banking-bridgewater-economy.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FFinancial%20Legal%2FRegulatory&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=9&pgtype=collection&_r=0).

<sup>97</sup> Deudney and Ikenberry, *Democratic internationalism*, p. 7.

<sup>98</sup> Kupchan and Trubowitz, ‘Dead center’, p. 29.

Liberalism, this study suggests, requires a non-liberal environment in order to thrive—and the successful ‘liberalization’ of that environment thus ironically undermines liberalism itself. The future of democratic internationalism, then, depends on the re-establishment of some equivalent of the domestic/international divide—which is precisely what current populist movements aim for. Yet, while there are clear (and frightening) parallels between the demise of the liberal world order in the first part of the twentieth century and its crisis today, there are also considerable differences. Both the Trump administration and the Brexiters quickly found that ‘taking back control’, building walls and stopping migration, was easier said than done in a highly integrated world order. Their less than inspiring example also seems to have undermined support for similar populist movements in other states. And the generational division in the Brexit referendum suggests that younger people feel much less threatened by cultural pluralism—or maybe simply lack the experience of a thriving, relatively equitable and prosperous liberal polity to return to. As Moshik Temkin has recently observed, although history displays instructive parallels, it rarely repeats itself. We can thus not predict the future of democratic internationalism on the basis of historical precedent. ‘But we can provide a critical, uncomfortable account of how we arrived at our seemingly incomprehensible current moment.’<sup>99</sup> And this is what a critical theory of liberal internationalism enables us to do.

<sup>99</sup> Moshik Temkin, ‘Historians should not be pundits’, *New York Times*, international edn, 27 June 2017.

